

**Box 4.34**

**Times of Hurricanes**

With the objective of disseminating messages on disaster prevention to communities at risk in an interesting and easily understandable way, UN-ISDR, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and CEPREDENAC joined forces to produce a radio drama series, *Tiempo de Huracanes* (Times of Hurricanes).

Conveying important messages on hurricanes and disaster reduction, the drama consists of four different stories which are divided into 20 chapters of 30 minutes each. These carry the listener through the issues of what could happen before, during and after a natural hazard such as a hurricane or flood. It looks at the consequences of not being prepared and how negative impacts may be reduced through preparation and awareness.

It also analyses the roles which men and women play in society and what can be done to increase community capacity to prevent negative impacts of disaster situations. In addition to the main topic of disaster management, stories also cover topics related to health, gender and migration, to mention the most important ones.

Since early 2002, the radio drama *Times of Hurricanes* has been widely publicized and played by radio stations throughout Central America and Mexico as well as in South America (Venezuela, Ecuador) and the Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic).

Starting on 9 October 2002, in observance of the International Day for Disaster Reduction, and during the following month, *Times of Hurricanes* was broadcast by 46 radio stations throughout Central America, including those in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

The campaign was coordinated by a Costa Rican NGO called *Voces Nuestras*, in collaboration with the regional network of local radio stations, *Centroamerica en Sintonia*, and with financial support from ISDR, PAHO and IOM. In June 2003, 86 local radio stations throughout the countries in Central America started the re-broadcast of the *Times of Hurricanes*, just at the beginning of the hurricane season.

The production has been a huge success in communities throughout the region and requests keep coming in for producing more of these kinds of radio series. In response to this, the ISDR Secretariat in collaboration with PAHO, CEPREDENAC and UNDP produced a new series "Tremors in my Heart", on topics related to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and landslides. *Tremors in My Heart* was launched in October 2003. <<http://www.eird.org>>



**In the Spotlight: Radio Progreso, Honduras**

Radio Progreso was one of the 46 radio stations that began broadcasting the radio drama on the International Day for Disaster Reduction in October 2002. Every Saturday afternoon, the residents of La Guacamaya, a small township in north-eastern Honduras gathered in community buildings, neighbour's homes, at the football field, or anywhere where they could listen to the latest chapter of the radio drama *Times of Hurricanes*.

La Guacamaya is located between two creeks that were completely harmless before Hurricane Mitch struck Central America in 1998. After several days of rain, they overflowed causing landslides that destroyed over 200 of the town's 300 homes. Luckily the mud and other debris fell relatively slowly, giving residents the time to flee. After Hurricane Mitch, residents formed groups to tackle immediate basic needs: food, shelter, and drinking water.

A similar approach has been employed in Asia where the Sri Lanka Urban Multi-Hazard Disaster Mitigation Project of the Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Programme and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center has produced a television drama about disaster reduction called, *Of an Event Foretold*.





## Future challenges and priorities

### Public awareness

Effective public awareness requires sustained activities in several areas. Following are some priorities for the future:

- official policies that promote the value of disaster risk reduction;
- the use of public education and professional training as primary tools;
- establishing closer partnerships between disaster managers and the media;
- gender-sensitive public awareness campaigns;
- increasing the value of public events; and
- using multiple interests to publicize risk issues.

### Official policies that promote the value of disaster risk reduction

Authorities and local leaders have a responsibility to provide information and the means to ensure public security. There is considerable scope to inform and advise the public about hazards and the risks they pose.

Local communities must be involved in the dissemination process as well as being the recipients of information. Political support is equally important if sustained financial allocations are to be ensured for public awareness.

### Using public education and professional training as primary tools

As there are few specialized courses currently devoted to disaster risk management issues alone, there is a challenge for education authorities as well as professional training institutions to develop these programmes. There are efforts being made to introduce more risk issues into the training of professionals such as engineers, meteorologists, urban planners and physical scientists.

There are many additional areas of instruction such as environmental management, public administration, geography, and most of the social sciences which have not typically regarded risk awareness as part of the syllabus. This should change.

Learning about natural hazards must begin in school. As important institutions in most local communities, schools and educators can serve an important role in motivating students to become involved in exercises, public discussions and other activities that promote disaster reduction outside the classroom.

### Establishing closer partnerships between disaster managers and the media

There is a need for more frequent and better-informed media coverage about risk reduction before a disaster occurs. However, if the community itself were to become more interested in this subject, the media would reflect this interest. Risk reduction programmes should involve media representatives, ensuring a well informed and concerned media. It is vital that disaster managers and journalists interact regularly, in particular, before a disaster occurs, in order to lay the groundwork for effective working relationships in the aftermath of a disaster.

By becoming more familiar with each other's work, disaster managers and journalists can join forces to ensure appropriate messages reach audiences, as well as allowing for effective and widespread

dissemination. Rather than employing sensational media coverage techniques showing shocking images of human emergencies in order to draw international aid, it is important for the media to report on how people actually live with risk from day to day.

### **Gender-sensitive public awareness campaigns**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that women are typically the most affected by disasters, often due to cultural norms that constrain their access to disaster information and emergency warnings. However, it is important to note that women are not only victims but are also agents of change. By working together, women and men can identify those hazards that threaten their lives and livelihoods and commit to building safer communities.

In many cases women are in the valuable position within communities for advocacy, initiating and promoting grassroots disaster reduction initiatives. If women are neglected as a target audience, they are unable to participate in minimizing risks associated with daily activities. For example, if women are excluded from the issuance of a warning of an imminent cyclone, they are unable to make preparations to evacuate the area with their family members in addition to the essential assets required to survive.

### **Increasing the value of public events**

Special commemorative events have a useful role in raising the visibility of natural hazards and reflecting on the consequences of earlier unmitigated disasters. But they are no substitute for more substantive commitments to build public awareness. It is important that additional activities be pursued on an ongoing basis, so that public interest does not fade after the special event.

### **Using multiple interests to publicize risk issues**

One of the biggest challenges in promoting risk awareness is to remove the subject from the sense of crisis or trauma that ordinarily accompanies it. Disaster risk reduction is not an emergency service. Rather, it should be considered as one of the daily concerns of people where they live and work.